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ABSTRACT

Using the metaphor of the "Wizard of Oz," this paper satirizes the use of an unofficially identified and often highly paid group of educational consultants to reform and revitalize special needs career/vocational education. It begins with the premise that leaders in the educational system believe that they can somehow install three internal, essential ingredients for reform and revitalization through the use of "consultants from Oz" who possess specific rational answers to many educational, vocational, and social problems that challenge the educational system today. The main characters from L. Frank Baum's novel, "The Wonderful Wizard of Oz," personify the human longing to seek out external sources that will somehow be able to provide answers to internal questions. This mindset generally fails to recognize and support the strong internal identities and expertise that each school and school system already possesses. The paper concludes that too many educators forget, or may never have realized, that the most important lesson the Wizard of Oz taught to Dorothy, the Scarecrow, the Tin Woodman, and the Lion was to use the power that they had within themselves to make things better. (YLB)

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The External Consultant as the Wonderful Wizard from Oz—A Parody

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Abstract

Experience, confidence and heart are essential ingredients for reforming and revitalizing special needs career/vocational education. Ironically, many of us as leaders in the educational system believe we can somehow install these three internal elements externally through the use of an unofficially identified and often highly paid "in crowd" of educational consultants. "Consultants from Oz" that possess specific rational answers to many of the educational, vocational and social problems that challenge our educational system today. This paper is a parody. The main characters from L. Frank Baum's novel, The Wonderful Wizard of Oz, personify the human longing to seek out external sources that will somehow be able to provide answers to internal questions. The author contends that this, "Wonderful Wizard from Oz" mindset generally fails to recognize and support the strong internal identities and expertise that each school and school system already possesses. Too many of us as educators forget, or may never have realized, that the most important lesson the Wonderful Wizard of Oz taught to Dorothy, the Scarecrow, the Tin Woodman, and the Lion was to use the power that they had within themselves to make things better.

The External Consultant as

the Wonderful Wizard from Oz—A Parody

"Dorothy, our career/vocational resource representative is going to fly in the Great Consultant from Oz; I am going to ask him to give me some children with brains," remarked the vocational agriculture instructor, "for the children I get in my classes have heads full of straw."

"And I'm going to ask him to give me children with motivation in their hearts'," said the Sheet Metal Shop Teacher.

"And I'm going to ask him to send Toto and me back to the 50's when children showed teachers respect, in little red school houses in Kansas," said Dorothy, the career/vocational resource representative.

"Do you think the Wizard Consultant from Oz could give me more control over the teachers I supervise?" asked the black and blue work experience coordinator.

"Just as easily as he could give me children with brains," said the aggie.

"Or send me back to the 50s," said Dorothy.

"Then if you don't mind, I'll chip in some grant money to co-sponsor the Wizard Consultant with you" said the black and blue work experience coordinator (Baum, 1900/1983).

"We're flying in the Wizard", a.k.a in Hawaii as the flight of the seagull (someone from the mainland who flies in, deposits his/her pearls of wisdom, and flies away), characterizes one of the thorniest dilemmas confronting special needs career/vocational education reform and restructuring in the 90's:

expertise-seeking vs. self-reliance (Deal, 1986; Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991). Dorothy and her two companions, as with so many of her professional colleagues in education today, have been trained and encouraged to look outward and upward rather that within for solutions to problems confronting their special needs education systems and settings. Certainly, the judicious use of an external consultant with expertise specific to one or more of the complex reform or restructuring agenda(s) that confront and confound special needs career and vocational education may prove to be invaluable when it comes to getting some new program or procedure "off the ground". Special needs educators may welcome the clear direction and guidelines that external consultants provide. As Fullen (1991) remarks, not to seek any outside help is to be more self-sufficient than any reasonable learning organization would allow. Nevertheless, there are two main problems with using external "Consultants from Oz". The first is that the packaged "solutions" most external consultants offer "may not be as adequate or as powerful as we would like to believe" (Deal, 1986, p. 125). Even if they prove useful these solutions are generally most influential during the early (i.e. initiation) stages of the reform or restructuring process, and may not be appropriate or may not go very far toward inspiring and/or supporting "the process of putting into practice an idea, program, or set of activities and structures new to the people attempting or expected to change" (Fullen and Stiegelbauer, 1991, p. 65). The second is, as Dorothy and company later discovered, the "Consultant from Oz" approach fails to acknowledge and exploit the inner resources that school systems and settings and the individuals within those systems and settings already possess.

"You are all wrong," said the little consultant meekly. "I have been making believe."

"Making believe!" cried Dorothy. "Are you not a great Wizard? Did we not pay you $5000 a day plus expenses?"

"Hush my dear lady," he said. "Don't speak so loud or you will be overheard, and I should be ruined, and forced to return to my old job in pre-owned auto sales. I'm supposed to be the Great Wizard Consultant from Oz."

"And aren't you? Dorothy asked.

"Not a bit of it, my generous benefactor; I'm just a common man."

"You're more than that, said the sheet metal shop teacher, in a grieved tone. "You're a humbug" (Baum, 1900/1983).

Fullan (1991) suggests that consultants, whether from without or within the system, need some degree of knowledge and skill in both the **content** of the innovations being considered, (i.e. expertise in the substance of the curriculum or program area in which they are trained), and also in the **process** of how that innovation is to be implemented (i.e. knowledge of how to plan, conduct, and follow through on the professional development activities they have suggested for implementation). The consultant who inspires his audience to "adopt" a new career education plan or process may do more harm than good if little effective follow-up and supportive technical assistance is provided. "Put differently, in deciding on or in assessing the role of consultants, we should have in mind not only whether they obtain or provide good information on give occasions (e.g. a workshop), but also whether they or someone else follow through to provide support for the use of that information" (Fullan & Steigelbauer, 1991, p. 224). Deal (1986) cautions that many of us fervently want believe that "Consultants from Oz" (especially highly paid ones) are privy to some mystic "cookbook" of rational receipts or spells which will somehow eliminate complexity from our professional lives and/or provide us with metaphoric lifeboats that allow us to ride out the "tsunamis" of social change that threaten to inundate us daily. It is not surprising that we often become angry and frustrated as we watch these externally derived and delivered policies, guidelines, and

recommendations encounter the complex reality of our general, special and vocational education system, and invariably become less "wizardlike" than they initially appeared. "Knowledge of experts, opinions of influential persons, and values of diverse groups meld into guidelines that apply across the boards—and slip between the cracks" (Deal, 1986, p. 126).

"You are a very bad man", said the 3 co-sponsors.

"Oh no, my friends, I'm a very good man; its just that I'm a very bad Wizard."

"Can't you give my students brains?" asked the vo-ag instructor.

"You don't need to give them brains. Your students are learning more every day. A baby has brains but it doesn't know much. Experience is the only thing that brings knowledge, and the more genuine experiences you can share with your students, the more knowledge they are sure to get."

"That may be true," said the Aggie, "but I shall be very unhappy unless you give my students brains."

The false Wizard looked at him sadly, "Well," he said with a sigh, "I'm not much of a magician, but if you come back tomorrow morning, I will show you best practices for filling your students heads with brainy facts. I cannot tell you that th y will be able to use them in actual situations, for we all must figure that out for ourselves."

"What about more control over my teachers?" asked the black and blue work experience coordinator anxiously.

"You are confusing control and obedience with self-control ," answered the Wizard.

"Your teachers have plenty of self-control and expertise I'm sure. All you need is enough confidence in yourself to let them demonstrate it. Your vocational education programs will flourish when you have enough courage to transfer the responsibility for discipline and quality to your teachers themselves, and that kind of courage you have in plenty."

"Perhaps I have, but I'm scared just the same," said the coordinator. "I shall be really unhappy unless you give me some control techniques that "teacher-proof" the system and makes one forget he is afraid."

"Very well, I will give you that sort of courage tomorrow," said the Wizard.

The consultant from Oz, left to himself, smiled to think of how easy it will be to give the vo-ag teacher, the sheet metal shop teacher, and the work experience coordinator exactly what they think they want. "How can I help being a humbug," he said, "when all these people make me do things that everybody knows can't be done? It's so easy to make these three happy because they imagine I can do anything. But it will take more than imagination to carry Dorothy back to the 50s, in Kansas, and I'm sure I don't know how it can be done" (Baum, 1900/1983).

Experience—the very characteristic we aspire to in Tech Prep, Goals 2000, IDEA, and the fledgling "School-to-Work Opportunities Act"—is the characteristic the "Consultant from Oz" mindset most often devalues. Confidence—the feeling that "change is something we as professionals cause to happen" rather than "change is something that outside forces cause to happen to us" is what we as career and vocational educators so often lack. And our heart—remember the sheet metal shop teacher—ticking faintly, in fifty minute increments, all too often lacks the strength to pump the life blood necessary to reinvigorate our anemic classrooms and schools. Experience, confidence, and heart are essential to reforming and revitalizing career and vocational education. "Excellence or improvement cannot be installed or mandated from [Consultants from Oz]; it must be developed within. It must arise from collective conversations,

behaviors, and spirit among teachers, administrators, students and parents within a local school community" (Deal, 1986, p. 126-127). As we begin our journey down the "yellow brick road" of reform and innovation in career and vocational education, administrators and practitioners would do well to remember the lyrics of the old 70's rock and roll song by *America*, "Oz Never Did Give Nothing to the Tin Man That He Didn't Already Have."

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